

In the Claims:

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (Currently Amended) A fire barrier ~~for protecting an object from encroaching elements~~ comprising:
 - an organic bentonite-based material;
 - an outer boundary surface disposed to retain the material in a selected location, the location at least partially surrounding the object; and
 - wherein the organic bentonite-based material is disposed within the outer boundary surface such that a top surface of the material remains uncovered and exposed to the aboveground environment after disposing the bentonite-based material within the outer boundary; and the organic bentonite-based material forming a region about the object, the region configured to prevent plant growth and thereby protect the object from fire.
2. (Currently Amended) The fire barrier of claim 1, wherein the boundary surface comprises a retaining device configured to retain the material.
3. (Currently Amended) The fire barrier of claim 1, wherein the object comprises a pole.
4. (Currently Amended) The fire barrier of claim 3, wherein the material is disposed surrounding the base of the pole.
5. (Currently Amended) The fire barrier of claim 3, wherein the material is disposed around the pole extending outward from the pole a distance of between about 6 inches to about 10 feet.

6. (Currently Amended) The fire barrier of claim 3, wherein the material is disposed around the pole extending outward from the pole a distance of between about 2 inches and about 5 feet.
7. (Currently Amended) The fire barrier of claim 3, wherein the material is disposed around the pole extending outward from the pole a distance of about 3 feet.
8. (Currently Amended) The fire barrier of claim 3, wherein the material is disposed around the pole to a depth in the range of between about .25 inches and about 4 feet.
9. (Currently Amended) The fire barrier of claim 3, wherein the material is disposed around the pole to a depth in the range of between about 4 inches and about 2 feet.
10. (Currently Amended) The fire barrier of claim 3, wherein the material is disposed around the pole to a depth of about 8 inches.
11. (Currently Amended) The fire barrier of claim 1, wherein the boundary surface comprises a annular plastic sheet.
12. (Currently Amended) The fire barrier of claim 1, wherein the boundary surface comprises the edges of a depression.

13. (Currently Amended) A method for protecting an object from fire, said method comprising:

preparing an area surrounding an object for receiving an outer boundary surface, the area extending from the object a distance suitable to keep vegetation outside the area from igniting the object;

providing-disposing an-the outer boundary surface disposed to retain a material in a location, the location at least partially surrounding the object; and

depositing an organic bentonite-based material-mixture comprising at least 50% bentonite within the outer boundary surface, a top surface of the bentonite-based material mixture remaining exposed to the aboveground environment after disposing the bentonite-based material-mixture within the outer boundary surface, the bentonite based mixture creating a hostile growing environment for vegetation.

14. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 13, wherein providing an outer boundary surface-preparing an area comprises creating-excavating a depression about the object for holding the mixture material.

15. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 13, wherein providing an outer boundary surface comprises installing a circular plastic sheet configured to retain the mixture material.

16. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 13, wherein depositing the mixture material further comprises depositing the mixture material in a radius about the object.

17. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 13, further comprising depositing the mixture material and forming an upward slope towards the object.

18. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 13, wherein depositing the mixture material further comprises pumping the mixture material from a source.

19. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 13, ~~wherein depositing the material further comprises pumping the material from the source~~ further comprising adding bentonite to the bentonite based mixture in response to signs of vegetation growth within the bentonite based mixture.

20. (Currently Amended) A barrier ~~for protecting an object from encroaching elements~~ fire comprising:

an organic object;

an organic bentonite-based ~~material mixture comprising at least 50% bentonite and up to 50% soil~~;

an annular plastic sheet disposed to retain the material mixture in a selected location, the location at least partially surrounding the object;

the material mixture is disposed around the object, between the plastic sheet and the object such that a top surface of the material mixture remains uncovered and exposed to the aboveground environment after disposing the bentonite-based mixture material between the plastic sheet and the object, and extending outward from the object a distance of about 3 feet and to a depth of about 8 inches; and

wherein the organic bentonite-based mixture creates a hostile vegetation growth region about the object, absorbing water and maintaining a salinity level toxic to vegetation thereby protecting the object from combustion of vegetation within the location.